

Comics: Meet the Artist Glenn McCoy Cartoonist, "The Duplex"

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http://discuss.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/zforum/04/r_style_cartoon052104.htm

Welcome to the Washington Post Style section comics discussion, hosted by Comics page editor Suzanne Tobin. This week, Tobin welcomes Glenn McCoy of "The Duplex."

McCoy will join Tobin online Friday, May 21 at 1 p.m. ET to discuss "The Duplex" and the art of cartooning.

Submit questions either before or during the discussion.

Editor's Note: washingtonpost.com moderators retain editorial control over Live Online discussions and choose the most relevant questions for guests and hosts; guests and hosts can decline to answer questions.

Suzanne Tobin: Welcome, comics fans, to another edition of "Comics: Meet the Artist." Today our guest is Glenn McCoy, creator of "The Duplex," which is carried in our Express edition that is distributed free at the Metro stations. Glenn is joining us from his offices at the Belleville News-Democrat in Belleville, Illinois, where he is the editorial cartoonist. Welcome, Glenn, and thanks for joining us Live Online.

Glenn McCoy: Greetings, junior crime stoppers.

Suzanne Tobin: Congratulations on being nominated in both the comic strip and greeting card categories for an award this year at the National Cartoonists Society convention next weekend. In the comic strip category, I notice your fellow nominees are Brian Basset (Red and Rover) and Stephan Pastis (Pearls Before Swine). What do you think of your competition?

Glenn McCoy: I'm friends with Brian and so that throws a whole dynamic into it. I haven't met Stephan but I love his strip and try to check it out whenever I can, but it doesn't run locally.

Gainesville, Va.: What breed of dog is Fang?

Glenn McCoy: Originally he was a pit bull just because the strip was all about masculinity vs. femininity and I tried to come up with the most masculine dog, but now I'm not sure what he is.

Adams Morgan, Washington, D.C.: Hi, Glenn, I know this is putting you on the spot, but I'll ask it anyway. Of the editorial cartoonists working today, who would you say are your favorites?

Glenn McCoy: Wow. That is putting me on the spot, I just saw all these guys a week ago at the Editorial Cartoonists Convention in Lexington, Kentucky. Mike Ramirez from the L.A. Times is a great cartoonist, as well as Steve Sack from the Minneapolis Star and Jeff Koterba from Omaha, Nebraska. Those are my contemporaries that I like, but people like the late Jeff MacNelly had a huge influence on me as well as my whole generation of cartoonists. Then of course there's Pat Oliphant, who is still regarded as the dean of editorial cartooning, and he's still as great as he's always been. I could go on, but I just love the whole field of cartoonists, I think there's a lot of exciting stuff being done. It's a great time to be an editorial cartoonist, as far as material to work with.

Harrisburg, Pa.: How did you enter the cartooning business? Did you study art and did you have other jobs prior to creating "The Duplex?"

Glenn McCoy: You might want to look at my bio on ucomics.com, but to make a long story short, although I've been drawing cartoons since I was a kid and working for all my school papers, I never considered it a feasible career path. But as I was working as the art director for my local newspaper, where I still work today, someone notified me of a cartooning contest sponsored through USA Today and King Features Syndicate. The top 300 entries would get a really cool hardbound book on the history of comic strips. So I entered because I wanted the book and I accidentally won the contest, so I never got the book. But I did spend a week in New York with King Features and I stayed with Mort Walker, who does "Beetle Bailey," washing his car. But from then on, I had the attention of a lot of syndicates asking me to submit comic strips to them. From there, "The Duplex" sprung up.

Fort Wayne, Ind.: Are there plans for another Duplex book? What about the rumors of a Duplex TV show?

Glenn McCoy: I spent a lot of time trying to come up with the title for the first "Duplex" book and I finally settled on "The Duplex," which I'm pretty proud of. The second "Duplex" book is in the works. I'm hoping it might come out by the end of the year.

The TV show has been in different phases of development and has hopped around to different production companies. I think the last one was the company owned by one of the guys from 'N Sync, but I think his astronaut training got in the way. So now, as far as TV, I'm more focused on another idea that's in development with Disney.

Annandale, Va.: "The Duplex" is a great strip, up there with "The Norm", "Overboard", and "Frazz."

Who do I have to sleep with to get it into The Washington Post?

Glenn McCoy: Me. (If my wife is reading this, I'm only kidding!) Seriously, I'd like to know who I have to sleep with to get it in The Washington Post.

Holyoke, Mass.: Mr. McCoy,

Big fan, I miss seeing your comic everyday. I have two questions: 1. If you were to do a movie of "The Duplex," who would be the voice of the dog? I was thinking either Dom Deluise, or maybe Cuba Gooding Jr. (I think for the girl dog, Mo'Nique is the only way to go.)

2. I'm a big fan of Cathy, and I was just wondering if Eno would get along with her. I don't think they would, because they're dogs wouldn't get along (Or maybe they would... opposites do attract!)

Thank you.

Glenn McCoy: I was thinking Dom Deluise and Cuba Gooding Jr. too. Geez, I never thought of it. I know when they were developing the show as a live action series, they were thinking of Luke Wilson for Eno. But I could never see that. Boy, I'm drawing a blank. Maybe the guy from Saturday Night Live who always did, "Yeah, that's the ticket!"--Jon Lovitz? Or Joe Pesci, perhaps?

Actually Fang would probably strike out with her dog. And I don't think we

should mix comic strip worlds where in one there are large noses and in the other there are no noses.

Chicago, Ill.: Your bio on ucomics.com mentioned that you drew cartoons for Playboy in 1992. How long did that last and what was it like? How was the pay?

Glenn McCoy: Pay? I'm still working for Playboy and it's just a nice outlet to move some of my cartoon ideas that aren't suited for "The Duplex." I think I was just in the last issue and I'm sure I'll be in the next one. I'm usually in nine to 10 issues a year, out of the 12. (When I told my mom I was going to appear in Playboy, she was a little worried.)

Silver Spring, Md.: Glenn: I enjoy reading "The Duplex" on my ride in on the subway each morning. The other day you had Fang mowing the grass. Can you tell me how to teach my dog to do that?

Glenn McCoy: That's one of those reoccurring setups that I use over and over, like Charles Schulz used Lucy pulling the football away. I have others like a policeman at the window or Eno getting slapped in a bar, so I'm rapidly running out of gags involving the lawnmower, so if any of you have any ideas on that gag, feel free to send them on.

Sterling, Va.: Hi, Glenn. I've enjoyed Eno's recent forays into the dating world. Do you think he'll ever make it past the first date?

Glenn McCoy: This is one of the many inconsistencies with the comic strip that I do, and I probably shouldn't point these out. But when I have a good gag that would require Eno to have a girlfriend, this woman named Millie appears in the comic strip, but then on other days he's obviously unattached and looking. I try not to think too much on how all this works out in the end. It's kind of like Fang is, on some days, more like a dog and drinking out of a toilet bowl, and complaining about dry vs. wet dog food, but then on other days he's much more of a human-type cohort for Eno. Even going so far as to having them both checking out women in a bar, which opens up all kinds of creepy possibilities if this was really happening. But I think that speaks to how pet owners like me...who somedays your dog is your dog, and on other days, he's your best friend. (Although I've never cruised single bars

with my dog.)

Farragut West, Washington, D.C.: Mr. McCoy:

What do you think about the trend of allowing old comic strips to hang around long after they were even close to being funny? The Post has a number of them, several where the original artist has been dead for several years and someone else writes the strip.

Glenn McCoy: Actually I'm kind of creeped out by it. The comic strip, to me, is an art form. And I couldn't imagine anyone else drawing Charlie Brown, and I'm glad that Schulz stipulated that he didn't want that to happen. I think that this speaks to how cartoonists, in a lot of ways, are like standup comedians. You have the old school guys, like Carson and Hope who saw their job as to make people laugh and that was it. So they had no problem with buying gags but now you have comedians like Seinfeld and Robin Williams who look at comedy as more of a reflection of them as individuals. And you saw this on the comic page, with people like Watterson and Larsen, who you felt you knew them because their strip was a reflection of them. The older strips, like the soap opera strips, have more to do with the final product than who's drawing them. There's less and less real estate for young cartoonists to claim on the comics page and it would be nice if some of the older strips that have served their purpose could step aside.

Adams Morgan, Washington, D.C.: I'd much rather see your comic in the Post than Cathy. "Oh, I'm fat! I hate swimsuit shopping!" Okay, we get it, it's been 300 years. I think the post needs new blood.

Glenn McCoy: Please let The Post know how you feel. There might be a fruitcake in it for you.

Suzanne Tobin: Every single day on the second page of the comics, underneath the crossword puzzle, we print the phone number and e-mail of how to comment on any of our comics or features. For the record, it's 202-334-4775 and comics@washpost.com. The reader feedback really does make a difference to the powers-that-be, of whom I'm not one. I give them my opinion, but I don't make the final decision. So please, please, please, let them know how you

feel. We're here to serve the reader.

Suzanne Tobin: In addition to being the editorial cartoonist for the Belleville News-Democrat in Belleville, Ill., you're also a children's book author. How did you come up with the idea for "Penny Lee and Her TV"? Was it prompted by personal experience?

Glenn McCoy: I was doing work for Disney Animation and they apparently sent some of my drawings to their publishing side, Hyperion, and I got a call from an editor who asked me if I had any ideas for children's books. I said, "Yeah, I had lots of ideas for children's books," and then I went home and tried to come up with ideas for children's books. But Penny Lee was just a character in a sketch book that I really can't reconstruct how the idea for the TV thing came up. It just wrote itself one night while I was sitting in front of the TV.

Seattle, Wash. : Haha, Duplex runs in the Seattle Times!

Question on the strip: Are the female "couple" gradually going away? I see them so little, I really can't remember their names. How come you don't play up any romantic tension between the guys and the gals?

Is Fang fixed?

Glenn McCoy: The original concept of "The Duplex" was very symmetrical. It was going to be half guys and half girls. It was going to be like two worlds colliding, with the ultra macho side on one side of the building and the feminine side on the other. But in the course of developing the strip over the first few years, whenever I came up with a funny gag, I wanted to give it to Eno, he's just a funnier pitchman for my humor. I do see this as a problem with the strip that I do need to reconcile at some point. I don't know if I need to get in better touch with my feminine side, or have my wife help out as far as writing the girls stuff, but I do hope to bring them back into the strip more, and then maybe develop some story lines just for them. As far as romantic tension, it became apparent early on that Gina was out of Eno's league, unless she had some sort of severe head trauma, there's no way that Eno stand a chance.

However, I think Fang could possibly make a move on Mitzi. He's the suaver of the two guys. As for his fatherhood possibilities, that's between him and his vet.

Maryland: How far do you work ahead?

Glenn McCoy: Two weeks on the dailies, and six weeks on the Sundays. I tend to do most of the strips on Fridays and Saturdays, which are my drop dead deadline days, which doesn't earn me any brownie points at the syndicate.

Cheverly, Md.: Which do you prefer, editorial cartooning or doing the comic strip?

Glenn McCoy: I consider them two totally different things, and that's why I try not to introduce any politics into "The Duplex." In fact, I usually draw them at two different tables, for some weird reason.
As I said earlier, "The Duplex" will always be my first love.

Suzanne Tobin: I'm looking forward to meeting you next week at the NCS convention. I noticed that in the greeting card category, one of the other nominees was Gary McCoy? Any relation? And who publishes your greeting cards? Can you give us an idea where they're being sold?

Glenn McCoy: My cards are more in line with the stuff I do for magazines...they're single panel gags, and someone at the card company writes a clever line to go inside it. Gary McCoy is my brother and we share a lot of the same clients as well as the same parents. Gary got me drawing as a child, he's two years older than I am, and I consider him one of the top cartoonists in the country. He's a freelancer and has been nominated the last two years for his magazine work by the NCS. We were both nominated in the magazine category last year and I beat him out, and during my acceptance speech, I said that Gary is the one who started me drawing and I bet that at this very moment he really regrets it.
As for where they're sold, I've seen them in Borders and in Papyrus, which is like a stationery store that is in some malls. They're published by Marcel Schurman. I also work for American Greetings and Nobleworks.

Santa Rosa, CA: You have a very funny strip.

That said, I hope I win.

Stephan Pastis
"Pearls Before Swine"

Glenn McCoy: No trash talking on the board, Stephan.
I am looking forward to meeting you though.

Charlottesville, Va.: Hi. Thanks for taking my question. How did you come up with the name Eno for your main character? Your two main characters, Eno and Gina, bear an odd resemblance to Post funnyman Gene Weingarten and his sidekick Gina Barreca, who also write about the battle of the sexes. Coincidence?

Glenn McCoy: I guess so, since I've never heard of them.
I had an uncle named Eno, it's just a funny name.

Suzanne Tobin: You've also worked in character development for animated TV shows. Can you give us an idea of what that process is like?

Glenn McCoy: Slow, very slow. They will send me a script and I will read it and decide if I feel like I can do the script justice with my drawings. And then they usually come out and meet the writers and I set out to come up with how I would envision the characters look. Which is involves turnarounds-drawing the character from the front, the back, the side-and then just doing conceptual drawings from the script of different scenes and different moments. And then it's out of my hands. I just cross all my fingers and wait.

Suzanne Tobin: If you had to choose between your various types of work (editorial cartooning, comic strip, animation, children's books, magazine illustration), how would you rank them?
Which of those career tracks would you like to take if you could only do one?

Glenn McCoy: Well my first love is still "The Duplex." Since I was a little kid, I was a fan of the comics pages and I was weaned on the old "Peanuts" paperbacks. So Charles Schulz became a hero of mine and I would study his

work and his delivery and his art so that when "The Duplex" finally made it on the comics page on that momentous day...just seeing my comic strip appear on the same page as "Peanuts" was the biggest thrill of all. If I had to rank them in order of their importance to me, I would say "The Duplex" then my editorial cartoons, then my magazine work, then the children's books, and then everything else, the animation and the greeting cards.

Glenn McCoy: Well, I've just about finished drawing about a week of cartoons while we did this interview, which probably says alot about my work ethic. Picture me tugging on my earlobe, in Carol Burnett fashion. Now I'll go sweep up a spotlight.

Suzanne Tobin: Thanks, Glenn, for being so good at multi-tasking! I hope you and everyone else will join us again in two weeks for another edition of "Comics: Meet the Artist."